

The History of Skootamatta Lake Lodge

This document attempts to capture the history of Skootamatta Lake Lodge. The primary content is authored by Bill Machan who gave a presentation to the Cloyne and District Historical Society (CDHS) several years ago on 'the Lodge'. Bill currently lives with his wife Heather on Skootamatta Lake. Some notes and content have been contributed by Muriel Vaness. Appropriate photos have been inserted but we encourage viewers to visit the CDHS Flickr page: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cdhs/> for several more photos. Below Bill's speech are other documents pertinent to the history to 'the Lodge'. Thanks to Bill Machan and others who contributed this interesting history.

Speech By Bill Machan

My name is Bill Machan and my family owned a piece of heaven we named Skootamatta Lodge, and this is an insight to it's history, as well as to my childhood. I hope you find it interesting.

There is a piece of property, approximately 20 acres in total, on lovely Skootamatta Lake. I was told the word Skootamatta is Algonquin for 'sparkling waters'. The property was originally owned by George Pearson Sr., who owned a radio company in Indianapolis, Indiana and later Chicago, Illinois. On this property is a cluster of log and stone buildings, which form the main living spaces, and as well, there are 3 cabins and a boat and pump house. Originally there was also a large 'ice house' as well as a wood shed/workshop. But sadly, these 2 buildings have since fallen down. ARO (Alfred Ross Osborne) was the 'quarterback' of the construction and Jim Meeks was the Lead Builder. Edward Flieler did the stonework.



Skootamatta Lodge as it appears today

The buildings were built back in the 1920's, as a summer home for the Pearson family and continued that way, until 1950 when my grandfather Herb Machan and my father Merrill Machan, purchased the site from George Pearson. The earliest picture I have of what we

called 'the lodge' is dated 1954 at which time I was 10, and that is the time this tale of Skootamatta Lodge begins.



It was a wonderful place furnished with oriental rugs, Hudson Bay blankets in all the bedrooms. The beds were high off the floor and were handmade birch bark frames, made by the Bay family, a Mohawk family who lived in the area.. There were many big fan-back Rattan chairs, custom furniture, along with a number of hand made chairs made again, by the Bay family. On one of the 35 foot high walls, in the main room, was a mahogany sailboat with a 6 foot mast and sail. It was the kind used in those ponds in England where they race these models. There were many coal oil lamps, a bear rug, along with a wolf rug, enough Willoware china and crystal shakers and matching silverware, to feed about 20 people. There was even a player piano in the 'stone room' along with many



DINING ROOM

rolls of music to be played. And just a number of real neat things that filled this little 10-year old's mind.



STONE ROOM (RECREATION AREA)



It is hard to imagine the work and hardship endured to build and furnish this complex, when sinks, toilets, 2 huge cistern tanks, lights, furniture, all appliances, just about everything,

had to be transported by some kind of a boat or barge from the Trail's End boat landing. And then around what is known as Osborne Point and down the shore, about a half mile or more to be unloaded and taken uphill to the site.



The shoreline then, did not resemble what it does now, because there was no road, which limited the number of 'pioneers' that would or could, build along a shoreline that was boat or foot access only. Along the north shore where the Cotes are now, Archie Meeks had a number of green boathouses, along with a number of green flat bottom boats he would rent. Since there was no road to the 'pre lodge property' I presume the Pearsons rented boats from Archie



to transport items, as well as themselves, until the Pearsons purchased boats of their own. So envision boats of some kind, travelling from the landing around what is called Mikes' Island, and into a bay where they could land at the 'King's Landing', which is a spot near where Bev and Joe Scott live now. From there, their choice was either walk, or take a cart ride, drawn by horse, up to their property. Or they could take the longer boat ride from the landing, around Osborne Point, down the shoreline to their property site. And it would have to be done rain or shine, windy or calm.

But George couldn't have minded it, as he purchased most of that north shore. And he, Bill Lazalle, Ross Osborne and, eventually I believe Harold Ballard, joined the gentleman's group of large land purchasers. Over the years, they sold off limited numbers of lots. But on the shore, where Kent Farrow has his current cottage, George used to have a big green two story building that sat up on the flats overlooking the sandbanks, which were at the time, about 30 feet high. They have pretty much grown over now, and are lined with cottages. But in George's building, he stored lumber, china, some furnishings and other items, until they were



Left to right: Mike Schwagger, George Pearson Sr., Unknown, Sid Ballard

ready to take to the building construction site, or for furnishing the finished residence. On this north shore, near the landing there also used to be T.A. Wilson's Saw Mill. But it was gone at my time, or just not in my memory bank.



About a half mile out from the landing, is an island known as Mikes' Island. On that island was a cottage that became the Post Office for the lake region. The cottage was later towed away on the ice due to environmental problems. But until then, cottagers would go by boat, from their cottage somewhere on the lake, to the island, to pick up their mail. I have wondered why the mail would originally emanate from the mainland, then be transported to an island for pick up, instead of the boaters simply picking their mail up at the mainland, in the first place. But I guess Mike Schwager, who was the Post Master, and who the island is named after, must have won the contract to handle the mail.

When we owned the lodge, I can remember the smoldering remains of the only neighbouring cottage, which belonged to the Moore family, who were also from Indianapolis and friends of George Pearson. One of their sons was Clayton Moore, who would later become the Lone Ranger. Fast forwarding a little, the lodge is currently owned by the Halperin family which they use as a summer home. They have a recording of their conversation with Clayton, that they had after they purchased the 'lodge'. The Halperin's are also responsible for the work that was done to preserve the original Moore boathouse. In this file is a picture of Clayton as a young man and before he wore a mask.





Pearson Cottage (later Skootamatta Lodge) on Left, Moore Cottage on Right

Leaving this history, pre 'lodge' timeline behind, while the Pearsons must have been enjoying their wonderful life, north of 7, my Grandfather and my Father, owned the Machan Lumber company in Kingston. Dad had been drawing rough cut lumber from the Thompson Lumber company in Eganville, hauling it down 41 highway to Cloyne. There, the rough-cut lumber was re-sawed at Potter's Saw Mill, which was situated on Benny's Lake, which is located across from the Cloyne Post Office today.

Note: Muriel Vanness says the saw mill was named Potter & Lee - situated where Cloyne Village Foods (Shell Station) is now. They put the logs in the other side of the lake and floated them across and up a chute to the mill. Harry Meeks worked for them.

Then Dad took the lumber onto Kingston. During his driving, I presume he learned of the availability of the Pearson property being for sale, from his friend and hunt camp member, Art Dunbar. Art, together with Don Little, owned the Shell gas station, which is now the Petrocan station, in Kaladar. So, in and around 1950 my grandfather and my father purchased the property and decided they were going to operate it as a tourist lodge. Sounds exciting right? But first they had to overcome the fact that there still was no road access. My Dad struck a deal with Manion in Plevna. They could have the road construction business, on the provision that when their bulldozer was not in use, Dad could use it to hasten the construction of the road. There is a picture of Dad, with no shirt on, plowing away some of the road burden. I guess back in the 50's there were no blackflies, mosquitoes, deer flies or horse flies, so he was able to work without his shirt.



Merrill Machan Bulldozing Road at Lodge in 1950

In any event, the road was completed to the Pearson property. The township took over the maintenance of the road, and we were open for business as the Skootamatta Lodge. It was advertised in *Field and Stream* and *Outdoor Life*, as a lodge that accommodated 16 guests and included wonderful meals. And while running a lodge was a change in the life of my parents, it was the start of my life. A change, I am so thankful for. My family owned and ran it for about 3 years or maybe four. We did indeed serve a wonderful meal cooked by a wonderful man named Lornie. We had waitresses serving, led by Isobel Woods. Although my family sold the lodge after that time, fortunately for me, we took it back again, as the new owner defaulted on the payment. We then kept it as our summer home for about 2 years or maybe 3. It was later bought and resold many times. Two of the other owners were the Cassidy family, who also owned the Flying Dutchman Motel near Oshawa. And Ted Cornyea was another owner, and he owned the Tweedsmuir Hotel in Tweed. But just as many times as it has been bought and sold, it also has been looted that many times by thieves.

The buildings did have power, plumbing and there was a septic tank. The power came from a Delco system, which was a 6-cylinder Chev engine, that I started with a crank. When the last light was turned off, it would automatically shut the Delco system off. The water came from the lake and was pumped up hill into two huge cisterns that when filled, would gravity feed the toilets, sinks and bathtubs. And the septic tank was buried into the ground in the woods behind the building. We even had a telephone that when cranked, we could communicate from the boat house to the main building.

To operate it as a lodge, we would remain in Kingston at our home, until approximately May, when I would leave school and finish my year at the school in Cloyne, which is now the Cloyne

Motor Inn. And then I would return home when school again started up in September. That by itself, was an experience for me, leaving a brick school in Kingston for a wooden school with 2 or 3 grades all in one classroom, and fighting with some of the local kids, each recess as 'that city kid'. I am lucky that some of the Tully kids were friends, to help me. The Tully's were some of the great people in my life. Ernie and Florence Tully had about 5 or 6 sons and 1 daughter. Their home was a regular holding spot for me at the end of the school day, as well as a place for many dinners, until my parents could come to pick me up. Although there was some sort of a school bus, it would only go as far as the Tully's, because it could not make it back up one of the hills that Dad had to leave in place. Dad would also take Ernie sometimes, by boat, down the lake to Killer Creek where Ernie would jacklight a deer or bear, he needed in order to feed his brood at home. Ernie was a great friend.

Note: Muriel Vaness says: Ernie Tully lived in Selby and came back here to work for John Potter at the saw mill on Benny's Lake. Then they moved back here.

Another regular and friend was Arnold Flieler. He gave me my first airplane ride in his float plane. He would land at the lodge, taxi to the dock and take any of the tourists up for a sightseeing flight over the area.

Another person who entered my life was Walter Meeks, who was a frequent guide for us and I am so thankful he got me interested in fishing and I even eventually learned to guide for many of the American tourists we had. So here was my new life, a wonderful ranch like home, on 'sparkling waters', didn't have to do any work, with a cook that made all my meals, as well as packed a lunch for me when I went fishing, which was about every day. I had a friend who was a fishing guide, show me some pointers, I had a 16' square stern Peterborough canoe of my own with a 10 horse Martin motor on it, along with an Irish Setter, who rode up front as ballast, and I could fish all day. Life was grand.

Jumping back to some of the people who entered my life. As I mentioned one of the buildings on the property was our 'ice house'. This is where we stored big squares of ice cut from the lake. I understand that George himself used to carry these chunks uphill to the ice house, during his time. But in my day, it was Leo and Elburn Meeks who cut and carried the ice. Elburn is long gone, survived by 'young Ab' as he is known. But Leo is still very much alive and is a great person to get to know, if you have time. The ice was kept in the ice house, under layers of sawdust and was needed for the fridges, or more accurately the 'ice boxes'. which were insulated cupboards, ill conceived, as the ice would eventually melt and invariably leak all over the floor.

Close to the lodge lived families such as the Carlyes, Stevens, Obornes, Lazalles, Rutlands Schwengers, Ingrams, Dunbars, Sowdens. Other names you might remember were Professor Jones, Stan Hughes, Bill Sowers, and Dr. Wylie. I remember going into Cloyne in one of our old panel trucks, to Bob Wise's General store, which was where the new school is now, in Cloyne. And the Wises's store was kind of next to what was then, another general store owned by Watson and Gibson, who had bought it earlier from Ezra Wheeler, then called Wheelers. More recently it was owned for years by John Grand and now owned by Mike and Stephanie and called Finnegan's General Store.

At the lodge, we did not have a liquor license, but there was another wonderful person, an OPP officer by the name of Gord Stout. He and other officers would put a blitz on for drunk drivers on 41 and 7. Some liquor would be confiscated, and it, and the officers would end up at the lodge for a great Saturday night party in the Stone room, with the many songs being



The Lodge c 1953 Owned by the Machans

played on the player piano. As long as there was some liquor left in each bottle that was confiscated, it could still be used as evidence of the arrest or seizure. Some of these parties included entertainment by whatever musical group had been playing that night at the Northbrook Hotel, owned by John Bolton Sr. When their gig was up on a Saturday night, up to our lodge they came, and the parties would look pretty professional. Gord and John were also great friends of our family.

Harry and Betty Meeks were other friends of our family and I can remember Harry telling me about him working on building Highway 41 through Cloyne for \$.35 cents a day. Back over at the Trails End landing was another great old friend named Harold Maybe, who had a little tuck shop and some cabins for rent. There was only one other such place on the lake, and it was in what is now Pickerel Bay, and was owned by Stan Hughes and called Hughes Landing. Both are a great part of my memory, for both sold ice cream and candy, as well as gas for the boats.

At the upper end of the lake, at a spot called Air Force Bay, was a large one story cottage that was used as a location for the military to learn how to live off the land and hone their training. It was a source of different fun for me, especially when I found a trap door in the floor, where below, they had a bin, about 4' x 4', full of canned goods, jams, Jack and Jill peanut butter, laughing cow corned beef and different crackers. If I wanted to stay fishing late at night, or camp out all night, a can of corned beef for myself and Molly, my Irish Setter, and a quick blast from their CO2 fire extinguisher, gave me ice cold water or pop. With their

food, and occasionally a parachute or a tarp, I was set for the evening. And there I went, no life preservers as we now know them, but then, they were simply a cushion that floated, or a wrap around thing with large cork blocks in it. No running lights on the canoe, an over powered motor on it, a big red dog standing up front, and I would end up camping overnight under a tarp, at the ripe age of 10 and loving every minute of it.

Over my 75 years I have forgotten many things, but very little about the people and minutes I have spent on 'sparkling waters' at Skootamatta lodge.

Heather and I have lived for over 30 years, on a piece of the property, that my Father severed off the lodge property. And we appreciate everything we have 'north of 7' and are particularly thankful for our medical clinic, the Tobia's pharmacy, the wonderful caring staff at Pine Meadows, and at Foodland, and Nowell Motors, Smarts Marina, our other Gas stations and building supply stores, and in particular, all the still living wonderful people that live here 'north of 7' .

And for me, particularly, my childhood spent at that piece of heaven called Skootamatta Lodge.

Thank you for this opportunity to relive some memories,
Bill Machan